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UNITED PRESS INTERNATIONAL  
13 September 1985

INTELLIGENCE EXPERTS HAIL SOVIET SPY CHIEF'S DEFECTION  
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WASHINGTON

The chief of the Soviet KGB's espionage network in Britain who defected may be able to supply much information on other Soviet spies, including "sleeper" agents planted in countries for future espionage activities, intelligence experts said today.

U.S. and Western intelligence circles were jubilant following Thursday's announcement by the British Foreign office of the defection of Oleg Gordievski, described as the head of the important London KGB center.

"I'm amazed he was able to survive for such a long period of time," said Soviet defector Arkady Shevchenko who left his post as U.N. undersecretary in 1978 to go to work for the CIA.

Former CIA Director Stansfield Turner said Gordievski's defection is "going to make it a lot easier for Britain and, hopefully for the West, to protect themselves from Soviet spying."

Shevchenko, Turner and other experts were interviewed on morning television news programs.

"I think the defector has information on Soviet spying efforts beyond his area of responsibility," Shevchenko said on NBC. "He was in a very important position. Besides, he used to work in Scandinavia so he got quite a range of knowledge about everything. I'm sure he also has political knowledge, not only espionage activity but other activity."

Other experts suggested Gordievski could supply background on Soviet strategic arms and political goals at the November summit meeting in Geneva between President Reagan and Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

Turner, a CBS consultant, said the KGB chief may have decided to defect now "because the KGB may have got a tip off and may be hot on his trail. He may have wanted to come in from the cold ... to enjoy the sort of Western life he has seen."

Brian Freemantle, British author of a book on the KGB, said Gordievski "is possibly the most important defector to come across to the West in 20-25 years, maybe even longer than that."

He said Gordievski could identify Soviet "sleepers" -- agents sent to foreign countries years ago who adopted identities, families and jobs with the mission of surfacing later for active espionage work.

"Moscow will not know who he can identify and who he can't," Freemantle said.

Earlier, other American intelligence experts greeted the defection as a "bonanza" that could provide vital military and political information to the West before the superpower summit in November.

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"I think it is a great break," said Ray Cline, former CIA deputy director for intelligence and former head of the State Department's Bureau of Intelligence.

Cline, a 30-year intelligence veteran, said Thursday the defection "comes at a time when there has been a tendency both in Europe and America of wishful thinking about Soviet policies and anticipation of the summit."

"It is through such occasional defections that the free world has got the best insights into the real working of the Soviet political system," he said.

David Atlee Phillips, another CIA veteran and former head of its Latin American and Caribbean operations, said London is a key spot in the KGB's overseas network, ranking with Paris, Washington and Tokyo.

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"London is terribly important because it is what we call an 'information channel' for important messages," he said.

Gordievski's defection could have a bearing on the summit, Phillips said.

"One of the major responsibilities of an intelligence service is to advise political chiefs on the eve of any important conferences. It would seem that the head of their (KGB's) London office would know what is planned, what the position is."

An active intelligence source who asked not to be identified said of the defection, "Speaking for the intelligence community, obviously we are delighted. It's a good thing."

The "intelligence community" embraces all U.S. agencies engaged in that field ranging from the CIA, the State Department Bureau of Intelligence, the FBI's counterintelligence branch to the intelligence sections of the armed services.

Another former CIA official, who requested anonymity, said the senior level defection "should turn up a bonanza of top intelligence."

Cline, now a senior associate and intelligence analyst for the Georgetown University Center for Strategic and International Studies, predicted in a telephone interview that Gordievski's defection "will be a very important development."

"Most people don't realize how valuable it is when we get a defection like this," he said. "He (Gordievski) can tell you things how the system works that confirm other data and research and analysis that we do which require confirmation from inside sources."

Cline said the defection may prove the most important since that of Shevchenko, who has written a best-selling book exposing the Soviet U.N. mission and its members of the U.N. secretariat as primarily engaged in espionage.